

FINDING QUEENSLAND IN AUSTRALIAN CINEMA

Poetics and Screen
Geographies



Allison Craven



Finding Queensland in Australian Cinema

Anthem Studies in Australian Literature and Culture

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In loving memory of Ruth and Vince Craven

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INTRODUCTION

REGIONAL FEATURES

Region, like gender, is a form of difference. (Whitlock 1994, 71)

The many spectacles of places shown in Australian cinema are typically assimilated to all of Australia in terms of its difference from non-Australian places. The regional histories and participation in production and poetics of narrative are submerged, typified by a view of the region as the space of the 'nation writ small' (Moran 2001, 2). This book brings a magnifying glass to a selection of films either wholly or partly made in Queensland in a period, from the 1970s to the present, during which Queensland has come to the fore in Australia as a place of film production. The four sections of this book suggest its emergence from passive participant in an era when the hegemony of national cinema was unquestioned, to a competitive presence in the present transnational environment of film production.

The expansion of film production infrastructure in Queensland and elsewhere in Australia corresponds to the increasing transnationalism of the international industry. Cross-border film production is now regarded as normal (Goldsmith and O'Regan 2008), and this reflects trends in the de-nationalising of film and television as the effects of globalisation (O'Regan and Potter 2013).

Within this era of change, debate about Australian national cinema has persisted, and questions are asked as much about what is 'subsume[d]' by the 'national cinema' (Khoo, Smaill and Yue 2015, 8), as much as what is revealed of or about the place of Australia. Various approaches have highlighted the inherently 'international' character of Australian cinema (O'Regan 1996; Danks and Verevis 2010; Goldsmith 2010) or its 'transnational' scope (Goldsmith, Ward and O'Regan 2010; Khoo et al. 2015). Some investigate the inner cultural diversity of films that represent Australia (Simpson, Murawska and Lambert 2009), and speculate on the post-national connotations (Craven 2010; Khoo 2011a). The aim in this book is to pose the idea of region as a source of cinematic identity, and to examine how location affects a film's meaning.

Region, however, is not posed in the sense of regionalism, or distinct cultural practices or traditions, or the specific cultural geographies of diasporic identities. It is treated as a geographic construct, as the spaces and places 'outside the dominant metropolitan centres' (Khoo 2011b, 462). In Queensland, that includes coastal and inland regions within its land borders, and offshore islands of the Great Barrier Reef and the Torres Strait. In the transnationalised environment of film production, regional landscapes and film locations signify place as something of a trade commodity. Australia, including Queensland, has been promoted more actively as a film production destination for some time now, especially its rich offerings of places and spaces for location shooting. The 'Locations Gallery' on the Screen Queensland website currently lists nearly 1,500 places, landscapes, landforms and properties, private and public, available for use.¹ The attractions of locations are often supplemented through hosting by state and national agencies, Screen Queensland and Screen Australia, and the benefits of co-production networks and regimes of financial and taxation-based incentives. These regimes are modelled on comparable schemes in other nations that participate in the transnational production industry. In film production, as in the arts of the information age, the digitisation of the real is endlessly subversive of the constraints and contingencies of geographic place, and hence of that which it most commodifies: cultural desires for a sense of place.

A Cinematic Sense of Place

The setting of a film may be read as a symbolic representation of the work the text does 'to find a place in which to speak and an audience on which to act' (Freadman 1988, 84). A sense of place in a film does not only result from setting. Film and moving image media have, arguably, uniquely mobile potential to evoke persuasive fictions of place. The conventions of realist cinema suggest place in a range of disparate and fluid sensory markers, visual, aural, verbal and non-verbal cues, through vision of settings, allusions to known or unknown places, or persons or events, and with supplementary devices such as voice-overs and inter titles, all orchestrated through establishing and action images, and *mise-en-scène*. Cultural and political discourses are filtered in these processes, and in the performances of race and gender. Location of production does not always anchor any of these elements, and its effects are variable in the utterance of regional differences, as much as differences of race and gender.

If this is the effect of the medium, it is inculcated more deeply through the institutional and cultural processes of cinema that apply provenance to a production. Production discourses, including the facts and contingencies of

locations, hold the potential to reinforce or disrupt the experience of the sense of place in the poetry of the film. Queensland on screen does not always mesh with local geography and knowledge, as in *Radiance* (Perkins 1998) when the church and pub are unrecognisable because the film's locations in Central Queensland are not the same as the diegetic place of North Queensland, or in *Mystery Road* (Sen 2013) when a recognisable site is renamed in keeping with the horror of racial violence. A sense of place, therefore, is more than a process of recognition; it is an 'experience' arising from 'regimes of affect' that induce 'a sense of intimacy, of being at home' and 'mingles with a sense of immensity or disproportion' (Routt 2001, 4).

The approach to place as a cinematic construct is therefore informed by ideas from the poetics of space (Bachelard 1994) insofar as these can be applied in film and television (Routt 2001). Anthropological notions of space and place underpin the connection to location, as elliptically framed by Michele de Certeau's idea of a place 'of whatever sort' as 'containing the order "in whose terms elements are distributed in relations of coexistence" and in a specific "location"' (Augé 1995, 53–54). Marc Augé says of this definition that it does not stop us thinking about how the elements are singular or distinctive, or about the 'shared identity conferred on them by their common occupancy of a place' (54). In these conventions, images or other signs suggest only a diegetic place, or, to use a term coined by William Routt, a 'narrative place' that is relational to how 'story space should appear on the screen, not upon the field of vision one is liable to employ in everyday life' (Routt 2001, 2). Narrative Queensland, or the people and places performed in its locations, suggests not only, to adapt Augé, what is singular or distinctive as evidence of Queensland, but what is contingent and even arbitrary in the signification of shared identity in the common occupancy of narrative Queensland, its regions and micro-sites.

Locating Queensland in Australian Cinema

Film technologies came to Queensland in the 1890s, like many other places in the world. The earliest films were government productions by official artists and photographers showing civic events and various regional spectacles of agriculture and engineering, including wheat harvesting on the Darling Downs, the sugar industry on the Sunshine Coast and the building of railways in North Queensland (Laughren 1996). A.C. Haddon's Cambridge expedition films of Torres Strait Islanders are among the first films created in Queensland in 1898 (Laughren 1996). The Salvation Army, through its Limelight Department, was also an early film-maker, who incorporated footage into its touring lecture presentations (Laughren 1996). While most of the Salvation Army's films

are lost, the organisation holds the quirky distinction of shooting Australia's first bush-ranging film – *Bushranging in North Queensland* – in Winton, Western Queensland, in 1904 (Gaunson 2010, 89; and see Chapter 8).² The Limelight Department also filmed sheep shearing for the first time in Australia, in Hughendon, Western Queensland (Laughren 1996).

This early history forms a distant part of the much later corpus that Albert Moran (1989) characterises as 'institutional documentary', in which Queensland figures prominently but in that pattern of emergence from passive to focal presence in the spectacle of nation. In *The Cane Cutters* (McInnes 1948), the regional difference of North Queensland is submerged in the evocation of the place of 'Australia', and in a narrative steeped in sexual difference. A rhythmic (male) voice-over intones the identity of 'we' the 'cane cutters' of 'almost half a million acres of sugar land in tropical Australia'. 'Stoop, chop, straighten, top; stoop, chop, straighten, top' – the rhyming refrain is repeated to the 'simple music of the swinging knife' in unambiguous identification of the 'men' who work the land. Their wives at home are said to work harder than the men. Unannounced in the voice-over, but visible in the swinging pan across the cane-growing region are landmarks of Far North Queensland. Road signs point to the regional towns of 'Cairns', 'Innisfail', 'Ingham'. But there is no explicit mention of Queensland in 'this 1300 mile Australian sugar belt', identified as 'tropical Australia', that is always ready with a 'tall crop' for the 'men with the knives', whose 'families come from all four corners of the earth'. The nationalist and nation-building rhetoric (Moran 1989) is unmistakable in this era of documentary.

A dramatic change is suggested in *From the Tropics to the Snow* (Mason and Lee 1964), the parodic documentary that satirises the making of a film about Australia. It figures Queensland as, not the hard-working place of nation building, but the holiday tropics, in featuring various locations that predict some of the images in the Location Gallery of today's Screen Queensland: the Gold Coast, 'sun and sand' and a 'tropical island complete with palms', an isolated Barrier Reef island; a mangrove-lined stalking ground for a crocodile hunter. The aesthetic is modernist, and the narrative world of the film is 'elaborated inside the classical Hollywood narrative' (Moran 1985, 107). Moran observes that *From the Tropics to the Snow* 'points forward' (107), referring to the direction of documentary style. This film also predicts the future of Queensland as a destination for production of film fictions of the tropics.

An erotic variation emerges in *Will the Great Barrier Reef Cure Claude Clough?* (Milson 1968). Queensland is imagined as a region of the unconscious, of repressed desires. Claude finds himself in therapy for anxiety, counselled by a red-headed woman psychiatrist who advises him to take a 'holiday'. 'Think of it', she says, 'the tropical north, blue seas, white sands, coconut palms'.

Claude descends into a reverie and fantasises the vision shown to the cinema audience: a splendid aerial view of the Great Barrier Reef, the coastline and islands of Queensland. But the place is not named. Deep in his reverie, Claude's fantasy of the holiday tropics is diagnosed by the psychiatrist as an 'ideal girl fixation' stimulated by 'old television movies'. The girl appears as the psychiatrist in dusky-maiden drag, with a long black wig and – an unlikely accessory – large, horn-rimmed spectacles. 'She's beautiful but mysterious,' says Claude. The fantasy merges images of Queensland with a fantasy of female sexuality derived from the Hollywood South Seas films of the middle twentieth century. As the 'local girl' draws him into the interior of a Barrier Reef island, he experiences it as 'jungle', and sexual threat, and then boredom. 'Island beauties went out with the *Mutiny on the Bounty*,' the psychiatrist observes. Claude conjures a mermaid, the same swinging psychiatrist with a long, blonde wig who takes him underwater snorkelling among the coloured fishes and coral beds, her hair waving around like marine vegetation. The fantasy concludes, after Claude's James Bond-style adventures in nightclubs and a pirate fantasy, with Claude and the psychiatrist swapping places on the couch.

The inspiration from Hollywood is spotted in the allusion to the *Mutiny on the Bounty*.³ Perhaps the slip reflects that the period of this documentary was one in which Australian domestic film production had subsided. But it was soon to re-emerge, and an influence was an international production set on an island in Queensland, *Age of Consent* (Powell 1969). Queensland is not a mystery destination in *Age of Consent*, but it is still a place of escape for an artist seeking refuge from the art world, in the fiction, at least. The tropical setting represented a break from the productions of the intervening period, which typically featured outback landscapes in figuring Australia. The contrasting scenic identity of Australia, emerging in the tropics of Queensland, underpins the chapters in this book, the regional semiotics of the productions and the passages of change in the film industry in Queensland.

The approach is framed, moreover, by the profound cultural influences of the Mabo Native Title legislation in 1993, and the longer-term outcome of the successful challenge in the High Court of Australia in 1992 that overturned the historical concept of *terra nullius* in upholding Torres Strait Islanders' territorial claims. Among the cultural implications, Felicity Collins and Therese Davis (2004) argue, is the paradigm shift in historical consciousness and structures of spectatorship on Australian films. While there is debate about the long-term impact of Native Title for Indigenous people (Collins and Davis 2004, 4; Keon-Cohen 2013), Collins and Davis's framework of 'backtracking' and 'aftershock' of the Mabo decision remains an insightful framework of interpretation of Australian cinema. 'Backtracking' is a lens whereby

they revisit Australian films in the years since the Mabo decision. Their book, like this one, is not about Mabo, nor do they perceive that Mabo resolved issues to do with land rights for Indigenous people. Backtracking, with its dual connotations of traversing land already travelled, and a changing of perspective, is an interpretive strategy, which they contextualise within wider domestic and international debates in the intervening era about history and culture. The time of cinema 'after Mabo' suggested for them an 'afterwardness' of colonialism 'during a moment of intense globalisation' (8). It is adopted in a more limited way here with attention to films made in Queensland since the re-emergence of Australian cinema in the 1970s to the more prominent role of Queensland within the industry in the present.

Backtracks through Landscape and Identity in Part 1

In the first section, 'Backtracks', the films presented are seen as artefacts of a national cinema in which the notion of Australian identity was more monolithic, and these films were made in the era before the Mabo Native Title claims. *The Irishman* (Crombie 1978) is highlighted first, in Chapter 1 'Period Features', as an example of a New Wave, or revival, film. This period of the 1970s was a decade of cascading film production that followed what is now generally accepted to have been a lengthy period of relative inactivity in Australian film production during the years following the Second World War. The revival bore the signs of a quest for a national identity, and it arose with a significant level of government support and hence public interest in its oeuvre, and is now seen as a threshold period in the national film industry. The analysis of *The Irishman* in Chapter 1 suggests how these revival films might be seen as a collection of regional voices and images that were shaped in production and distribution by a national, and occasionally, an international lens. In spite of its authorisation as a 'national' film through the provenance of the Australian Film Commission (AFC), *The Irishman* exhibits regional semiotics arising from its almost exclusive production relationship to Queensland, and its basis on a novel set in the region. Its production converges with the gentrified aesthetic of the AFC-genre films, and it becomes a heritage film, as I argue. It poses the construction of Australian identity as gendered, racial and bound, predominantly, to an outback setting, defined as man's country versus the homesteads and houses defined as the domain of the white woman.

The Irishman is also exemplary of the landscape aesthetic of Australian cinema. Australian films have tended to exhibit landscapes somewhat in excess of the conventions of classic Hollywood realism, and due to the historic tendency

in both literature and film to bring meaning to Australia through various mythologised, often ironised, topographies, such as the bush, the beach, the outback, the suburbs (Collins and Davis 2004). The 'landscape-cinema' of Australia 'assert[s]' its 'difference from the rest of the world' (Gibson 1994, 49). If place, as Edward Casey writes, is generally 'unlike the unconscious' in that it is 'not so controversial or so intrusive as to require repression' (Casey 1998, x), then the landscape aesthetic contributes to a particularly unrepressed sense of place in Australian cinema. But this is not to say that it is not without potential for some repressions.

Chapter 2, 'Heritage Enigmatic', extends the discussion of *The Irishman* through comparison with another earlier landmark film associated with the landscape aesthetic, *Jedda* (Chauvel 1955).⁴ *Jedda* remains a distinctive and yet contentious film (see Jane Mills 2012), in spite of its 2015 anniversary screening at the Cannes Film Festival, subtitled in French (Bodey 2015). It is contentious for its representational discourse and its production history, to both of which Mills alludes. In Chapter 2, *Jedda* is compared with *The Irishman* as films that include two of only a handful of principal roles for Indigenous women in feature films and were made decades apart. In each film the visual image supersedes the voice in terms of identity construction. This is apparent in the use of vocal dubbing whereby the heritage aura of the revival film is aligned with foregoing values. The dramatic spectacle of landscape in *Jedda*, of which the Aboriginal subjects were, in fact, dispossessed, is magnified as a national and cinematic asset.

Backtracking over landscape and identity in the opening section suggests how the landscape tradition operates not only as an aesthetic, but as a device that deflects other silences in identity formations of Australian cinema. Yet the landscape tradition is not monolithic, and the subtleties are visible even in these two films. *Jedda* exhibits landscape in an exotic way, more typical of the Western-style films the international Ealing studios made in the 1940s and 1950s, including *The Overlanders* (Watt 1946) and *Bitter Springs* (Smart 1951). In the case of Charles Chauvel in the making of *Jedda*, it was accompanied by a particular machismo of production adventure, termed 'locationism' by Stuart Cunningham (1991) (see Chapter 2). *The Irishman*, as a period film, on the other hand, adopts the more romantic and painterly convention associated with the period revival films in the 1970s. It descends from visual art of the nineteenth century, including the Heidelberg School of painters, who, among other characteristics, chose to paint "on location" and under the influence of outdoor light and its effects on the landscape (Elliott 2010, 148). This is echoed in twentieth-century film-makers who practise their art on location.

The 'landscape-tradition' in Australian cinema, as Gibson terms it, signifies more than 'an environmental setting for local narratives' (1994, 45). The role of landscape in Australian cinema suggests how the act of illustrating landscape involves a grafting of ideas that supplant foregoing ones, and how this process also signifies a sense in which the 'society is also to some contentious extent a "natural" outgrowth of the habitat' (49). The landscape tradition promotes the 'significance of European society in "the Antipodes"', he argues (45). The construal of the Australian landscape as 'empty space' suggests not only overlooking of inhabitants and signs of precolonial culture but how the Australian landscape was unassimilated into the European symbolic order, 'except as a motif of the "extra-cultural", as a sublime, structuring void' (45). The concept of *terra nullius* came to name this phenomenon, and continues to haunt visions of landscape even long after Mabo. A number of the films discussed in this book use the landscape convention more consciously to contest, disrupt and redress the earlier connotations.

In making visible narrative places, landscape is also implicated in making culture seem natural, and this is often the ideological effect in Australian cinema. As a sign, it has 'customarily been construed as a sign of nature', or of something preternatural (Gibson 1994, 49–54). This is in spite of the reality of Nicholas Rothwell's observation that 'landscape', in its historical distinction from both 'wilderness' and 'town', is a construct that is intrinsically 'closer to culture than nature' yet is invoked as an 'emblem' of the 'natural order', alluding to the derivation of 'landscape' from old German and Dutch words, 'land-schip', which refers to the distinction between wilderness and town (Rothwell 2007b). This tendency becomes more conscious and pronounced in the films discussed in the subsequent sections. While Collins and Davis suggest that coastal landscapes 'have yet to take on the iconic status of the desert and the bush' (2004, 115), I suggest how this occurs when Queensland is the figured place in the region of the coastal tropics and islands, and how a mythic cultural discourse of Queensland as paradise pervades these regional settings.

Tracks Forward: Silences in Paradise in Part 2

The notion of the tropics as paradise derives from classical sources and is transmuted to the classical notion of the 'antipodes' (Jericho 2005). Paradise myths are ancient, but most recently have been reinvented in white settler societies (Moran 2001). Paradise in Queensland is a recurring cultural trope since its inception as a state in 1859. The settings for myths and counter-myths of paradise in the films discussed in Part 2 are in North Queensland, although the north is not always exclusively associated with the myth of paradise in Queensland. Bruce Molloy (1990b) identifies the paradise myth in films shot

in or set in Queensland from World War II to the 1980s. He cites films in which Queensland serves as an 'exotic background to conventional stories', or 'a site of rich resources for the taking [...] through hard work', and sometimes a destination of an epic journey (Molloy 1990b, 66–68). His examples are *The Overlanders* and *Sons of Matthew* (Chauvel 1949), which 'celebrate the spirit of enterprise and the virtues of hard work' (70). He points out that whereas there is usually pessimism in encounters between pioneers and the bush, in Queensland settings, there is a contrasting success for the protagonists. *Sons of Matthew*, which was made around Lamington National Park and the Numinbah Valley in Southeast Queensland, is exemplary, with its biblical framework for the story of a pastoral dynasty which succeeds in establishing its place in paradise after overcoming all forms of natural challenges (cyclone, bushfire and flood) on the journey.

A much later example of Molloy's, in an outback setting, is *Buddies* (Nicholson 1983), which was shot on the gem fields of Central Queensland, and where a spirit of larrikinism is also to be observed in the hard-working ethic. Another of his examples is the Eden-like setting of *Age of Consent*, which was filmed mostly on Dunk Island in North Queensland. As these films testify, locations all around the state have been co-opted as versions of the paradise myth, such that paradise in Queensland seems less of a spiritual destination than an allusion to Queensland's difference from other states within the settler nation. Pertinent to this difference, too, is Molloy's noting of the 'depiction of eccentricity or excess' in feature films shot in or set in Queensland since the silent era, notably *On Our Selection* (Longford 1920) (Molloy 1990b, 72). Such types are found in literature as well (Craven 2013).

Chapter 3, 'Tropical Gothic', takes up the mythology of paradise, but in a contrasting perspective. The 'shock, recognition and trauma' Collins and Davis (2004, 9) associate with the confrontation of the fiction of *terra nullius* is registered in *Radiance*, the first feature film directed by Rachel Perkins, in which idyllic, prosperous, settler Queensland and its holiday tropics are contested and subverted. Image, sound and music contest the space of paradise in the story of three women who reunite at their family home in North Queensland for the funeral of their mother. Pregnant Nona (Deborah Mailman) hopes to raise her child in the family home and also longs to deliver her mother's ashes to her ancestral Nora Island, seen across the water. But her idealism is contested by Mae (Trisha Morton-Thomas) and Cressy (Rachel Maza), who reveal the history of trauma and violence that has occurred in the house, from which they are about to be evicted. Collins and Davis argue that *Radiance* is a definitively post-Mabo film because of the resonances of Native Title and the Stolen Generations in Nona's quest to return her mother's ashes to Nora Island. Whereas the prevailing debate

until the early 1990s concerned the representation of Indigenous people in cinema, and the critique of exotic stereotyping (Jennings 1993), more recently, film, as Nicholas Rothwell suggests, has become a 'frontier' of subjectivity in the hands of Indigenous film-makers (Rothwell 2007a, 31). *Radiance* was a groundbreaking film in this direction.

Paradise returns in the films discussed in Chapter 4, 'Island Girls Friday', where films set on islands in Queensland are linked to the myths of the South Seas. In terms of feminine myths, paradise island settings often stereotype the 'doomed erotic figure of the dusky maiden' (Pearson 2013, 154). This figure stems from imperial accounts of South Seas women and influences portrayals of Pacific women in imperial literatures and Hollywood films. Patty O'Brien argues that not only assumptions about the sexuality of Pacific women but also the 'environs determined [their] erotic potential' (2006, 51). The warm weather-inspired assumptions of heightened libido combined with perception of the feminine lack of reason to suggest sexual insatiability (54). Historical personages, such as the Tahitian Queen Oberea, who is named in the journals of the *Endeavour* voyages, 'launched the myth of Pacific women', according to O'Brien (63), and became counterparts of the masculinised myth of the noble savage (172). In Hollywood films after World War I, O'Brien argues, 'white women began to appropriate what they considered desirable in the Pacific exotica', and this tendency was also influenced by taboos on cross-cultural sexual relations (235). The Pacific siren becomes a racially crossed figure, she claims, with white or South American women playing the roles (235). Sometimes termed 'sarong girls' (Jericho 2005), these women are named by O'Brien as the "'Hollynesian", a Hollywood-styled Pacific muse of no consequential geographical location' and who was whitened to 'ease race anxieties' (235).

There is a detour from this narrative in Chapter 4 in the three films made on islands in North Queensland: *Age of Consent*, *Nim's Island* (Levin and Flackett 2008), a children's fantasy; and *Uninhabited* (Bennett 2010), a supernatural thriller. As 'island' women the heroines of these films are seen to adapt the 'bush woman' of an earlier cinematic era in Australia (the 1920s and 1930s) to the mythic spaces of the holiday tropics and the South Seas, and with variable cultural politics towards Indigenous presences in these spaces. *Age of Consent*, which generated controversy in its day, resembles the island paradise of Claude's fantasy (in *Will the Great Barrier Reef Cure Claude Clough?*). In *Nim's Island*, the South Seas literature of masculine adventure shapes the narrative place which Nim defends against invasion by 'Queenslanders'. *Uninhabited* is the only film of the three in which an Indigenous character is figured, who is Coral (Tasia Zalar), the ghost of an islander woman who was brutalised during her much earlier lifetime. Where *Age of Consent* is an Edenic paradise, in

which the innocence of the pleasures are unallusive to any past, its heroine wants to get away. *Nim's Island* and *Uninhabited*, on the other hand, are cognisant of the racial histories, and Europeans are incorporated as intruders, if in parodic and uncanny scenarios.

O'Brien's classical framework for deriving the origin of Pacific exoticism poses the corresponding myth of the 'unfettered sexual freedom of voyaging men', a key myth of the South Seas (2006, 68). The 'Odyssean temptresses' (9), the likes of Circe, Calypso and the sirens, figure a 'central theme of the Odyssean myth, which became core to Occidental colonisation, of the travelling man's exposure to sexual danger' (41). Their inability 'to withstand temptation was the great paradox within constructions of [...] civilised, Occidental masculinity' which was partly justified as the effect of the greater seductive power of South Seas women compared to those at home (75). This was influenced, she argues, by classical associations of water and ocean with goddesses like Aphrodite (or Venus in Roman tradition), and in legends of sirens and nymphs (see 47–49). The association of nakedness with the assumption of sexual readiness and availability was also deemed a 'virtuous lack of shame about sexuality' that "reminded" the Occidental mariner[s] of their own classical past' (79). This has implications for Bradley in *Age of Consent* and Harry in *Uninhabited*, who have something in common with the men in Part 3.

Paradise to Neverland: Masculine Dramas of the Coast in Part 3

The settings of the films are diverse in this section, and the focus is derived from the lately established hub of film production, the Gold Coast in Queensland. The emergence of the Gold Coast as a centre of film production and the presence there of Village Roadshow Studios has been accompanied by increased activity around the state, notably in Southeast and Far North Queensland (see Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7). The presence of the Village Roadshow Studios has both attracted and stimulated domestic and international productions, aided by production offset incentives, and supported by the film entrepreneurship of Screen Australia and Screen Queensland. The films discussed in this section represent times before and since these developments.

Chapter 5, 'The Sunshine Boys', is an account of the myth of Peter Pan as it emerges in two films made on the Gold Coast nearly 20 years apart – *The Coolangatta Gold* (Auzin 1984) and *Peter Pan* (Hogan 2003). *The Coolangatta Gold* was one of the first feature films made on the Gold Coast, as part of a larger goal of state and private interests to establish a film production infrastructure, as the chapter relays. The main spectacle of the film was an international beach-athletic event, the inaugural Coolangatta Gold

Iron Man Marathon, around which the family drama of the film is built. In spite of aspirations, it is not a highly regarded film but survives as a forward-looking enterprise that indirectly contributed to the present era of film production on the Gold Coast. In comparison, *Peter Pan*, a nostalgic fantasy production of J.M. Barrie's story of 'Peter Pan' – in which, coincidentally, Neverland is also an island fantasy – was produced in the (then) recently established Village Roadshow Studios on the Gold Coast. The mythic narrative of Peter Pan suggests how this history is underpinned by an ethos of adventure celebrated in the production ideology of film-friendliness (as defined by Goldsmith et al. 2010).

In Chapter 6, the myths of the South Seas are reintegrated in the diving drama of *Sanctum* (Grierson 2011a), for which the offshore setting of a cave in Papua New Guinea was created in the Gold Coast studio. The cave-diving team members are compared as late examples of the travelling man in the Pacific. This is not to suggest that the travelling men of *Sanctum* are 'unfettered', quite the opposite. Their chastity is attributed to the aura of the cave, another site of classical association through Plato's parable of the cave, and their attraction to extreme sport. The spirit of risky adventure is also linked to the transnational creative and production interests of *Sanctum* in the comparable pull of the film and commodity industries in Queensland towards markets in Asia, where *Sanctum* had its most successful release.

The imagining of Papua New Guinea in *Sanctum* is also contextualised with Jane Landman's (2006) account of the 'South Seas' films in Australian cinema history, a rival construction to the Hollywood South Seas imaginary O'Brien described. Landman identifies a crop of 13 films, putatively Australian, made from the 1930s to the 1950s. The films were set on the fringes of northern Australia in the Torres Strait Islands and Papua New Guinea, and involved a significant amount of location production, either in the places named, or elsewhere, including islands of the Great Barrier Reef. This corpus of South Seas films, Landman argues, presents masculine narratives of adventure and imperial romance within a spectacle of 'scenic melodrama' in which the places are exotic backdrops, and the Indigenous people are marginalised, or even disavowed. Moreover, this marginality is reiterated in the histories of distribution of the films, and in colonial censorship and control of Indigenous participation in and spectatorship of these films. The implications in Chapter 6 are for the evocation of the narrative place, and the masculinities performed in *Sanctum*. But the relevance of Landman's analysis of the racialised order of the scenic melodrama of the Australian South Seas films carries forward to the final section, in which, in the films discussed, scenic melodrama and the marginality of Indigenous people are contested.

Regional Rewind in Part 4

Chapter 7, 'Unknown Queensland in Torres Strait Television', considers two television mini-series set in the Torres Strait Islands – *RAN: Remote Area Nurse* (Caesar and McKenzie 2006) and *The Straits* (Andrikis, Ward and Woods 2012). The congruence between narrative place and locations of production is high in these series. Both are notable for their culturally collaborative location production in Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait. These series present Indigenous perspectives but in quite different genres, and utilise diverse approaches to representing the regional environment and registering the frontier of subjectivity. Where *RAN* is a test case of a collaborative venture that gives recognition to Torres Strait Islander culture and perspectives, *The Straits* deploys its tropical setting to excess in evoking an international genre, the crime family drama. A sense of tropical difference emerges in both series in settings that are presented initially to the (non-Indigenous) audience as 'unknown' places. The drama and spectacle is constrained to one island in *RAN* in a series that has attracted praise for its collaborative production and recognition of Indigenous perspectives. *The Straits*, in comparison, poses the wider region as a space of movement and action of the central family such that tropical difference becomes, arguably, a kind of parody of the scenic melodrama of the South Seas films.

In departing from the tropical, coastal regions to the inland zone, Chapter 8, 'Back to the Back', concerns two films made in the emerging hub of film production activity in arid landscapes of Western Queensland and centred in the town of Winton. The region has attracted a number of productions modelled on the American Western, and the examples discussed are *The Proposition* (Hillcoat 2005), which commenced this production trend, and *Mystery Road* (Sen 2013). These films return the gaze to the outback in Queensland spaces and register the continued aftershock of Mabo. The character types and use of genre re-impose the colonial sense of the place as frontier, but with knowing deployment of the genre tropes in contesting historical and contemporary racism. Performances of gender types from the Western transform the iconicity of the landscape and enable reflections on historical violence in the region.

The approach to these films is informed by Peter Limbrick's (2007, 2010) discussion of the Western as a mode of settler cinema, and Priya Jaikumar's (2001, 2006) account of the colonial place in (British) imperial films. Jaikumar's account of what she calls the 'modernist mode' of imperial film is defined in distinction to the 'realist' and 'romantic' modes, and 'gives primacy to the crisis of empire during decolonisation' and the concomitant 'breakdown of imperialism's categories of "self" and "other" through the sympathetic enactment of Western trauma' (58). In the modernist mode she notes the 'operation

of the colonial “place” whereby the ‘coherence of the narrative is predicated on the continuation of the colonial place as an unproblematic backdrop’ (58). Coherence, in the realistic or romantic mode, she argues, is maintained by ‘ignor[ing] the place’ which would otherwise have to become a site of ‘crisis’ itself (59). In the modernist mode, ‘the coherence of the imperial self’ is ‘broken’ and this occurs through forms of recognition of the place. There is comparison in the decolonising narratives of *The Proposition* and *Mystery Road*, and the sense in which the ‘backdrop’ is looked into, and the landscape, gains some form of subjectivity as it is investigated by the protagonists. It is ‘back-tracking’ of a purposeful kind.

In the simplest sense, this book is a story of the bush to the beach and back. The chapters suggest some dimensions in the way Queensland, the narrative place, or places near or within it are imagined and rendered through the films made in its locations, which invoke and imbibe the mythic, formal and local knowledges of the place, the people and the times in which the films are set or made. All are subject to the contingent and sometimes contrived methods of production, and the influences of the interests that support the practices.

Cinematic Queensland, like real Queensland, is syncretistic, and its variable elements suggest that what is known of it is contingent and interdependent with other identity constructions. In the films discussed in the chapters, the differences of region, race and gender emerge in the utterances of an art form overlain with institutional, industrial and cultural frameworks that extend within and beyond the state and in the transnational flows of cinema.